

Topic Interest as a Learning Construct to Elicit Learners' Oral Participation

Jessica Juliana Álvarez

Luis Alejandro García

Edison Mauricio Ramírez

*Author's notes*

Jessica Juliana Álvarez, Luis Alejandro García and Edison Mauricio Ramírez, Facultad de Bellas

Artes y Humanidades, Licenciatura en Bilingüismo con Énfasis en Inglés, Universidad

Tecnológica de Pereira. The correspondence of this classroom project should be directed to

Edison Mauricio Ramírez, Licenciatura en Bilingüismo con Énfasis en Inglés, Universidad

Tecnológica de Pereira, Cl. 27 #10-02, Pereira, Risaralda. Contact E-Mail:

[mauricio.ramirez@utp.edu.co](mailto:mauricio.ramirez@utp.edu.co)

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Jessica Juliana Álvarez

Luis Alejandro García

Edison Mauricio Ramírez

Adviser: Luis Miguel Coronado

Licenciado en Lengua Inglesa

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*Author's notes*

Jessica Juliana Álvarez Taborda, Luis Alejandro García Osorio and Edison Mauricio Ramírez

Facultad de Bellas Artes y Humanidades, Licenciatura en Bilingüismo con Énfasis en Inglés,

Universidad Tecnológica de Pereira.

The correspondence of this classroom project should be directed to Edison Mauricio Ramírez,

Licenciatura en Bilingüismo con Énfasis en Inglés, Universidad Tecnológica de Pereira, Cl. 27

#10-02, Pereira, Risaralda. Contact E-Mail: [mauricio.ramirez@utp.edu.co](mailto:mauricio.ramirez@utp.edu.co)

### **Abstract**

The aim of the current project is to have a deeper understanding of how different themes such as entertainment, healthy habits, leisure activities, and the future world among other subtopics we worked with, strengthen students' oral participation when being involved in different tasks and activities towards the EFL lessons. This classroom project was applied with the participation of 23 students, nine girls, and twelve boys taking a course three at the Instituto de Lenguas Extranjeras, ILEX, at the Universidad Tecnológica de Pereira. Also, it was linked to different methods facilitators can use such as elicitation techniques, which are expected to support learners and to enhance their speaking skill.

The instruments employed in this classroom project to gather the data were debates, role plays, interviews, small group discussions, and a short questionnaire implemented when each class finished in order to make students reflect on how they perceived their performance in class regarding their oral participation. It was found that the use of themes related to language learner's likes, needs, and interests proved to be a pertinent tool in order to enhance student's oral participation in the classroom and guided them to continue their language learning process. As a result, throughout the implementation of these set of themes and strategies learners also showed a better reaction to the EFL lessons by responding to the instructions and the commands made by the teacher in the oral activities without refusing.

### **Resumen**

El objetivo del proyecto actual es tener una comprensión más amplia de cómo diversos temas tales como entretenimiento, hábitos saludables, actividades de ocio y el mundo futuro, entre otros subtemas con los que trabajamos, fortalecen la participación oral de los estudiantes cuando son parte de actividades y tareas desarrolladas dentro las clases de la lengua extranjera. Este proyecto de aula se aplicó con la participación de 23 estudiantes, nueve chicas y doce chicos que tomaron el curso número tres del Instituto de Lenguas Extranjeras, ILEX, en la Universidad Tecnológica de Pereira. Además, éste proyecto se vinculó a diferentes métodos que los docentes normalmente pueden usar, como las técnicas de estimulación del habla, para promover el uso de la lengua extranjera en clase de las cuales se espera que apoyen a los alumnos y les ayude a mejorar su habilidad oral.

Los instrumentos empleados en este proyecto de aula para recolectar datos fueron debates, juego de roles, entrevistas, discusiones en grupos pequeños y además un breve cuestionario implementado cuando cada clase finalizaba, para que los estudiantes reflexionaran acerca de su desempeño en clase con respecto a su participación oral. Se encontró que el uso de temas relacionados con los gustos, las necesidades y los intereses de los estudiantes demostró ser una herramienta pertinente que conlleva a mejorar la participación oral del alumno en el aula guiándolos para continuar su proceso de aprendizaje de lenguas. Como resultado, durante la implementación de este conjunto de temas y estrategias, los alumnos también mostraron una mejor reacción a las clases de la lengua extranjera respondiendo a las instrucciones y los comandos dados por el profesor en las actividades orales sin negarse a éstos.

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### Introduction

Engaging undergraduate University learners to orally participate in class has become a challenge for language facilitators at the Universidad Tecnológica de Pereira, UTP. Since the University requires its student population to achieve a B2 level to be able to graduate, the student participants who enroll in the English courses at the Instituto de Lenguas Extranjeras, ILEX, belong to different programs, and thus have diverse likes and interests. Concerning how important is to orally communicate in the foreign language, skill that has not had the relevance it deserves inside the learning field, the idea of this project emerged as a guide to help students to enhance their oral participation inside the lessons. For this reason, this classroom project not only explore a variety of themes aligned with language learners' likes and interests, but also to implicitly implement a set of elicitation techniques in order to foster university students to be active class participants.

Due to the fact that there is little first-hand literature concerning the impact theme-based selection has over language learners' willingness to orally participate in class, this classroom project set its basis on two local studies executed by Romero (2009) and Prieto (2007) in primary and secondary schools, respectively. Both studies were selected since they focused on enhancing language learners' speaking skill and comprised two outstanding variables of affective factors impacting EFL learning such as theme-based and oral participation. In fact, the data obtained through implementation of the theme-based lessons will be stated in the part of the results stage. Lastly, the current classroom project was created and implemented as a requirement to graduate from the program *Licenciatura en Bilingüismo con Énfasis en Inglés*, undergraduate study conducted at the UTP.

### **1. Justification**

Having into account that the Ministry of National Education agreed on requiring university students to fulfil an intermediate English level B2 according to the Common European Framework of Reference for languages in order to graduate from their program, the Universidad Tecnológica de Pereira stipulated on the “Acuerdo 49” signed on November 9th, 2000 that all of the student community must certify their English language proficiency to graduate. Thus, the Instituto de Lenguas Extranjeras, ILEX, was created through the “Acuerdo 06” on February 6th, 2001 and has been in charge of providing students the necessary tools to reach the B2 level.

Furthermore, since most of the student population who belong to each of the ILEX language groups regularly come from diverse programs, they rarely encounter interesting useful themes to learn English, and therefore their opportunities to become effective foreign language users are diminished. In fact, it is paramount to state that the language themes normally implemented in the learning environments do not relate to the foreign language learners’ likes and interests, thus their oral participation is negatively influenced; nonetheless, when learners feel driven to learn, their willingness to be active class participants improves.

Hence, according to McDonough and Shaw (1993), oral communication is the linguistic awareness that makes planned spoken messages communicative for language learners. In fact, since according to Carter and Nunan (2001), it involves cognition as well as socio-linguistic knowledge, it is therefore considered as an essential type of communication when aiming to accurately transmit intended messages. Lastly, given the fact that Harmer (2009) mentioned that speaking offers the students the opportunity to use the input in real life-task situations, language facilitators have a crucial role enabling the learners to become active language users and class participants.



Moreover, regarding the possibility of the emotions that learners can experience such as the absence of confidence, motivation, and interest when being exposed to monotonous and uninteresting themes, oral tasks become eventually more challenging, and therefore difficult to accomplish. Hence, according to Al-Badi & Sumaya (2011) it is crucial for language facilitators to raise awareness about the relevance that learners' perspectives play towards their own eagerness to speak English. In fact, he emphasized that EFL facilitators are essential in order to assist and foster students' self-confidence, not only to develop their own capabilities, but also to provoke them to feel interested, and thus, to allow them to improve their language proficiency.

Consequently, due to the fact that the language learners who are part of Colombian state universities come from different educational and economic backgrounds, there is normally a lack of common topics which stimulate them to orally participate in foreign language classes. Therefore, this classroom project aims to provide evidence of how themes can impact learners' keenness to orally interact in class, in which future researchers can explore the field in related scenarios.

Furthermore, an initial survey was made to identify common topics which might interest them, and which were explored throughout nine lessons under the engage, study, activate (ESA) model coined by Harmer (2008). In addition, diverse elicitation techniques were implemented in each of the stages as well as during the language learners' spare time. First, yes/no and display questions, along with brainstorming were utilized to help learners to get involved and to prepare for the rehearsing stage in which they were, for instance, exploring different issues, in small groups, and share their opinions regarding the input to finally develop either interviews, debates, and role plays that allowed them to meaningfully incorporate specific target language items to

their lexicon. To conclude, learners not only self-evaluated their daily oral participation, but they also developed real-life tasks during their spare time such as taking selfies and posting them on a social media group telling the class what they were doing in order to use English in and out of class.

All in all, aiming to enhance language learners' oral participation, the current project exemplified the use of appealing, useful themes along with the support of a set of elicitation techniques which were executed in each of the stages of the ESA model by the researcher/facilitator in an ILEX intensive course three during eight two-hour lessons. As a conclusion, based on the impacts generated with this project, unbiased conclusions were drawn in order to enable the forthcoming researchers to explore the field in similar Colombian contexts.

Moreover, since English courses generally focus on material made for foreign countries, students do not usually find it useful, and thus feel demotivated. Hence, this classroom project not only helped either the practitioners or the language learners, but also the readership, who can comprehend the importance of incorporating meaningful themes to promote language learners' oral participation. Finally, by implementing a set of supporting elicitation techniques, students were enhanced to orally interact with classroom peers while utilizing the target language to share their thoughts about certain topics. Lastly, regarding students' likes, needs, and interests, they felt driven to learn the language to communicate themselves to the English language users.

## **1.2 Objectives**

### **1.2.1 Learners' Objectives**

- To depict how different themes strengthen language learners' oral production.
- At the end of the project, learners will be able to actively participate in class.

- By implementing learners' likes and interests, they will be able to relate English learning with their needs.

### **1.2.2 Teachers' Objectives**

- To inform about the applicability of implementing a set of themes along with elicitation techniques to increase learners' interests to orally participate.
- To observe the effectiveness of using student-relevant themes as well as elicitation techniques.
- To utilize the experienced process to facilitate learners' academic growth.

## **2. Conceptual Framework**

This chapter depicts the importance of promoting interesting themes as an enhancer of motivation in order to improve learners' oral participation in EFL lessons. To begin with, this framework focused on four main concepts: themes, motivation, interest, and oral participation. Therefore, it is paramount to deeply comprehend their definitions, variations, and implications to have a wider and a more objective perspective of their causes and effects over EFL learning.

Furthermore, although there are several ways of enhancing language learners' interest in the EFL settings, encouraging students' to be intrinsically motivated with themes linked to their needs, likes and interests not only allowed them to develop tasks for their own sake, but also to enhance their oral participation. On the other hand, based on the explored literature, we can affirm that activities designed with students' topics of interest increased their possibilities to participate actively considering that they had more to say about the topic; also, increased students' motivation because they found the activities meaningful and in this process, positive outcomes can be achieved in accordance with Romero (2009). Additionally, motivation and interest are connected to each other, and thus topic interest plays a fundamental role in language learning since the more interested learners feel, the more motivated they get to orally participate. Moreover, their cognitive processes was positively influenced because motivated and interested learners make greater struggles in order to learn meaningfully and for their own lives.

In addition to the benefits of interesting themes, being motivated and interested to learn a foreign language, it is relevant to emphasize on the importance recognizing the three types of interest: individual, situational, and topic interest, each of them with different characteristics and orientations to successful language learning. Also, after having made emphasis on the crucial role of themes integrated with the learners' motivation and interest when aiming to learn a

language, it is essential to recognize that they would be useless unless language learners could be active class participants. In fact, when the facilitator encounter language learners reluctant to participate, it would be paramount to incorporate elicitation techniques in order to boost their willingness to communicate with each other when being in and out the class. To conclude, in the following section we will start exploring the concept of themes defined by Romero (2009) and Mitchell (1993) followed by motivation in the lights of linguistics, pedagogy, and psychology such as Cook (2000), Ryan & Deci (2000) and Lightbown & Spada (2013) which will embody the essence of this classroom project, and which is more important, allow us to be able to define the main concepts.

## **2.1 Definition of Theme as a Learning Enhancer**

The essence of this section is to explore themes as the leading construct of this classroom project by contrasting the definition that different authors have already coined, identifying the influence of interesting themes play towards learning environments and EFL learners' improvements, and by relating the concept to language Learning and class oral participation according to the studies conducted by Romero (2009) and Mitchell (1993).

Themes is the starting point of this project, which is defined by English Oxford living dictionaries (2017) as the body of topics for study or discussion. Considering this, Romero (2009) a Colombian professor, emphasized the importance of themes in the educational field, he recommends teachers to create a meaningful concept of this term take into account the students' topics of interest to be selected, graded and sequenced. However, there is a concurrent relation to the definition of themes directly connected with students' interest in Mitchell's (1993) study, who suggested that some topic or event catches an individual's interest in a situational manner

that is supported by learning events that help the person to hold that interest. Sustained interest increases engagement and motivation to learn, as well as facilitates strategy use and deeper processing. Thus, the development of sustained personal interest is an important component of learning. This conception has led to several interpretations of how interesting themes should be viewed and more importantly, how can be applied to improve learners' motivation, for that reason will be necessary to deeply understand how motivation is conceived in this project, their variations, causes and effects over EFL learning.

## **2.2 Definition of Motivation**

First, since motivation to participate in class is the main purpose to be achieved when developing this classroom project, it is paramount to highlight that according to Cook (2000), language is mainly influenced by three factors: age, personality, and motivation. Additionally, he pointed out that motivation is the most significant issue when learning a language, and thus its definition will facilitate a better understanding of its effects on learners' class participation. In fact, Ryan & Deci (2000) claimed that being motivated entails to feel driven to develop a task. Moreover, they clearly stated that when someone feels no stimulus to move or to improve, he is identified as unmotivated, whereas when someone is empowered towards achieving a goal, he is recognized as motivated.

On the other hand, Lightbown and Spada (2013) pinpointed motivation as a complex phenomenon, which is mainly influenced by two factors: learners' communicative needs and learners' attitudes towards the second language community. Similarly, they affirm that when learners are aware of the need to communicate with others or to achieve certain goals, they feel encouraged to accomplish their target. Thus, it can be highlighted that motivation is a state of

mind which leads foreign language learners' to orally participate as a consequence of either intrinsic or extrinsic factors as well as by the techniques utilized by facilitators. Moreover, in the following part, we will explore two different orientations of motivation, which their causes and effects are and their contribution to the educational field.

### **2.2.1 Types of Motivation**

Since Ryan and Deci (2000) affirmed that human beings have not only different levels, but also different types of motivation, EFL learners' motivation has been arranged in two main categories: intrinsic and extrinsic, this in order to describe students' behaviors according to their type of motivation, and the effects each of them can have towards learning English as a foreign language.

First, Ryan & Deci (2000) coined intrinsic motivation as the interest that people have when they want to do something for their own enjoyment. To illustrate, Ormrod (2000) describes intrinsically motivated learners as those who are willing to do and to learn from classroom material. Moreover, as a result of their meaningful learning, they can effectively process information, and thus achieve their learning goals.

On the other hand, whereas intrinsic motivation can be defined as the inner drive to do certain tasks, extrinsic motivation is defined by Vansteenkiste, Lens, & Deci (2006) as the tendency to develop tasks because of reasons not related to it. To illustrate what Vansteenkiste et al (2006) claimed, they explained that obtaining rewards, avoiding punishments, or getting high marks are examples of the reasons why language learners act in such ways. Additionally, learners who are extrinsically motivated are frequently interested in performing easy tasks and meeting minimal tasks' requirements (Reeve, 2006). In brief, it is relevant to mention that both

types of motivation: intrinsic and extrinsic, are considered essential to conduct this project because it will allow both, the researchers and the readers to comprehend how learners' motivations influence their own learning process and stimulate do tasks in certain ways.

### **2.2.2 Motivation and Language Learning**

To start with, considering that English is the vehicle through which EFL learners are able to attain their main objective, each one of them ought to be either intrinsically or extrinsically motivated. Therefore, this section will explore the benefits of being motivated to learn a foreign language in Colombia.

First, since motivation is the route language learners should follow when aiming to be successful learners, it is essential to mention that according to Cook (2000) the language learning process is not the same among all students in general. In fact, Dörnyei (2001) presents three types of motivational sources which may vary due to individual-personal reasons: first, course-specific components, which refer to the syllabus, the teaching materials and methods as well as the learning tasks. Second, teacher-specific components, that consist of the teacher's behavior and personality, and the teaching style.

Finally, group-specific components, which mainly refer to the dynamics of the learner group. In brief, although learners' motivation can come either from themselves or from external stimuli, when achieved, these components can certainly boost their motivation to use that target language in a non-English speaking country such as Colombia.

In addition, although Brewer & Burgess (2005) stated that motivation is the main element learners need to activate in order to accomplish their objectives, if they feel demotivated with either one of the components stated by Dörnyei, they will not probably be able to fulfil their



objectives. In contrast, if motivated, learners will be more likely to improve their oral participation when being part of learning environments such as lessons and study groups, and thus by feeling confident and encouraged, EFL learners would be capable to accomplish their linguistic objectives, which will lead them to grow personally and professionally.

### **2.3 Definition of Interest in the Process of Learning a Target Language**

Student' interest holds so much power when a subject is linked to what learners tend to do, engagement is center on how students willingly employ time thinking, and making ideas in meaningful ways. Given the reasons why human beings learn better when they are motivated, it is also pertinent to mention that "There are several ways of enhancing students' motivation in the EFL classroom but an important one is to create the lesson on the basis of the learners' interests." Okon (2012:1). To illustrate, students' interests can be enhanced by applying some motivational features such as relating lessons with their lives as a way to improve self-motivation, curiosity, interest, and persistence when developing learning tasks. According to Mitchell (1993) Interest is a sense which occurs from the making of significant academic and outside experiences to help to increase individual's ability to do something. Usually, when students' learning context is related to their reality it maintains students' curiosity to understand and to explore the language not only for academic purposes, but also for their own satisfaction.

In addition, Fredrickson & Branigan (2005) observed that interest promotes learners' to live experiences that impacts their actions and thoughts. Hence, it can be stated that learners' interest is a fundamental source of motivation when learning a foreign language because it empowers their willingness to communicate their perceptions about thought-provoking matters.

Conversely, although several authors have coined different definitions for this concept, we agree that being interested means to have certain positive feelings towards an object, an activity, or a topic that at the same time maintains learners' attention, and which therefore can empower the connection between their own likes and interests with the target language. To illustrate, Hidi & Renninger (2006) declared that "The level of a person's interest has repeatedly been found to be a powerful influence on learning" (p.111).

In summary, using real-life tasks, which are linked to language learners' realities enhances their interest and motivation to employ the target language to express themselves while making language meaningful. Furthermore, in the next part, we will analyze different types of interest learners can experience when using the target language.

### **2.3.1 Types of Interest**

The aim of this fragment is to highlight how much influence interest has on learners' when learning a foreign language. Also, it shows the significant role of each diverse type of interest working as a motivator to improve learners' engagement in their learning process. Regarding the position towards students' learning process when being engaged, Rheinberg (1998) emphasized that it is crucial to mention how the connection upon interest and learning can enhance student's individual interest when they are using the target language to attain a specific outcome. In addition, three different categories have been defined in order to conduct the emphasis of students' language progression when learning a target language like this: individual, situational, and topic interest.

First, according to Renninger (2000), individual interest is a learners' personal tendency to react to different incentives, moments, and subjects; likewise, another type of interest is

recognized as *situational interest*, which is perceived depending on student's specific environmental stimuli when they are participating in specific learning settings. Finally, Chen, Darst & Pangrazi (2001) pointed out that another type of interest was identified as *topic interest*, which is generated when a specific theme is being presented to the student, and seems to have both individual and situational characteristics. Additionally, certain social actions and personal matters are included in the method of how tasks are organized and presented to the students, in order to make the activities meaningful and connected to their learning environment.

Moreover, Shen & Chen (2007) stated that learners must be dynamically involved in the learning process in order to make it meaningful. Besides, teachers should find the way to make the content not only interesting, but also meaningful for the learners, so they can apply it to real life situations. Lastly, students' interest is verified in the class participation setting when the target language is to be used, plus some modifications should be implemented in their learning setting to make them being comfortable when they are learning the language; some of these features are the following: teaching strategies and task presentations, placed in order to help students to share their thoughts and ideas orally, and enhance their learning experiences.

### **2.3.2 Interest Conceived in the EFL Field**

In order to increase learners' motivation, and therefore to ensure a better understanding when in an EFL classroom, it is necessary to incorporate the learner's likes and interests through meaningful real-life tasks. In fact, when learners are interested, it produces learners to be motivated to attain their goals. Moreover, Schiefele (1991, cited in Hartiner and Folling-Alberts 2002) found that language learners thoroughly think about a subject matter if they either have prior knowledge or are emotionally linked to it. In contrast, further studies mentioned by

Schiefele (1991, cited in Hartiner and Folling-Alberts, 2002) proved that learning without any interest is often cursory.

Since effective learning implies to be interested in the subject matter, if a learner reads a text about basketball but he is uninterested, he will not understand it as accurately as an interested reader would do. Furthermore, and as stated by Hartiner and Folling-Alberts (2002), whereas the uninterested learners will know the context only by repetition, the interested learners will internalize it while reading the text.

Additionally, according to Ainley, Hidi & Berndoff (2002) interest and intrinsic motivation are connected to each other in which can be perceived that people who are interested in a particular activity or theme spend more time and preserve a certain kind of attention to it. In addition, Krap (1993) highlights that the learning achievement can be reached by cognitive features such as intellect and non-cognitive aspects as enthusiasm and interest.

On the other hand, another study implemented by Herlmke (1993, cited in Okon 2012) supports the fact that pleasure in learning positively influences learners' achievements. This author also found out that when learners feel no pleasure to learn, generally avoid participating and doing homework. As a consequence, the deficits resulting from their avoidance might cause them to feel anxious to produce language (Hartiner and Folling-Alberts 2002).

All in all, the more interested in and linked to the tasks learners are, the better their academic performance is. To conclude, another significant point to highlight is that when learners' feel pleased to learn, it influences their willingness to participate and to do the assignments for their own sake.

## 2.4 Definition of Oral Participation

Regarding class oral participation, the more students struggle to improve their oral participation in class, the less anxious they feel to use the target language to communicate. To illustrate the stated thought, according to Carter and Nunan (2001), oral participation is related to the cognitive and socio-linguistic interaction that is usually improved by having constant class interaction. In fact, depending on the target language circumstances and on the academic environments, learners' class oral participation is influenced by their level of interest. Also, an educational study called "Understanding Strategies for Improving Oral Production Skills among EFL Learners at a Public University in Colombia" developed by Redondo (n.d) has been developed in order to assist language learners through some strategies such as role playing, developing performances, singing songs, and cooperating with each other's learning process, this in order to make students improve their oral production when participating in or out of the English language classroom.

Besides, Morozan (n.d) commented certain features related to the communicative events in which the desire to interact with other learners must be encouraged; likewise, since communicative purposes fulfil specific aims and make language meaningful, language learners must have one every time they interact; it will allow them be alert to use the target language to connect their thoughts. Hence, Morozan (n.d) explained that oral communicative tasks can enhance students to communicate in a teacher-student, or in a student-student negotiation, in which some of these activities can assist learners when communicating. In addition, in the same study, it was mentioned that oral activities cause in students the desire for communicating among them, and some of these activities could be discussions, communicational games, and problem solving.

Furthermore, Lanfont (2007) analyzed a variety of oral activities to help students to be risk takers when using the language both inside and outside the classroom; nonetheless, the activities which are meant to be applied in public make the students' feel concerned when they take place. In addition, the author considered that some particular issues such as confidence, risk taking, competitiveness, and social concern affect students' performance. Similarly, some issues regarding students' communicative factors are evidenced such as academic modifications, points of view, the understanding between learners as well as the absence of diverse attitudes for being part of the class.

#### **2.4.1 Willingness to Communicate**

Equally important, this fragment challenges to comprehend the issues EFL learners encounter most powerful in their longing when they are motivated and interested in participating in a foreign language class. On the other hand, we considered necessary the incorporation of the Brown's principles of Learning and teaching regarding willingness to communicate, and which was published in 2007. Since it highlights the importance of learners' emotional involvement when he or she communicates with others in a community.

According to Macintyre, Clement, Dornyei, & Noels (1998) willingness to communicate is determined by the desire to give a message fulfilling the listener's expectations. In fact, it has been illustrated that willingness to communicate blends certain concepts of self-confidence and risk-taking. In addition, there are some related concepts such as anxiety, which includes the level of learners' worry about themselves; self- efficacy, which means that language learners trust in their ability to achieve specific tasks; confidence, which is the skill to take intended risks when using the target language, both in an effectively and an accessible way. Moreover, Gardner

(2001) recognized that there may be other issues that have straight impacts on language succeed such as language learning approaches, language concerns, and confidence with the language use. Besides, the willingness to communicate emphasizes on more than just the aptitude to use a language. In fact, the language learning and the improvement of the communicative competence are main focus when aiming to enhance learners' desire when communicate.

Moreover, Yashima (2002) revealed that the concept of willingness to communicate is related to the main purpose of educational viewpoint and it appears to be conducted in several cultures. Although a number of instructional settings do not inspire students to take risks, they stimulate them to be precise, to provide right responses, and to cover-up with deductions while waiting for some of them to be corrected.

To conclude, language learners' desire to speak should be considered as a fundamental factor to ensure their own learning success, for this reason, some mechanisms effort to make students share their ideas about different subjects. Additionally, one of most relevant strategies is called elicitation techniques, which are used to provoke learners to think and to encourage them to ask and to answer questions in a teacher-student, and student- student interaction in foreign language class.

## **2.5 Elicitation Techniques as Communicative Enhancer**

Considering that although some language learners may feel willing to orally participate, they may not always know how to respond to certain tasks. Therefore, one of the most important issues to generate a real language learning setting is to allow students to share their ideas in the classroom. Frequently, elicitation techniques are utilized in order to make students think, use new words, and reflect about language forms and rules. In fact, by making learners refer to their

background knowledge allows them to be able to connect ideas, and therefore, to infer new meanings and even language forms and rules. Besides, EFL facilitators normally make use of the three different types of questions to elicit language from their students; such eliciting questions are: Closed/display questions, open-referential questions, and yes/no questions.

Additionally, Tsui (1995) argued that the categorization of the questions to be used in class can be chosen according to the type of answers they may cause and the communication they may produce. Furthermore, elicitation techniques lead learning environments to be learner-centered stimulating atmospheres. According to Thornbury (1996), most of the questions teachers make in class are displayed questions, which are frequently used, so their answers are predictable. On the other hand, although display questions are not designed to provoke discussions, these are mostly used in the classroom to check learners' understanding. In addition, another style of questions that is used to promote learners' awareness is referential questions, these types of questions have not defined or specific answers. Finally, Dalton-Puffer (2007) declared that these types of questions are likely to produce student answers in a better, more focused, extended and qualitative way which make them more realistic.

Even though Walsh (2013) determined that elicitation techniques involve asking questions to guide classroom interactions, yes/no questions are used to determine whether language learners apprehended what was explained rather than to promote learners' communication. To sum up, we can conclude that elicitation techniques should be implemented to boost language learners' to improve their speaking ability by making use of open questions, and thus to enhance their oral participation in the class interaction while using L2.



### 3. Literature Review

Regarding the significant role students' likes, interests, and needs play when learning English as a foreign language, the main purpose of this classroom project is to provide evidence on how a group of undergraduate University learners can enhance their oral participation when being engaged in the use of different themes related to their own interests. Thus, we based our classroom project on two national studies, both implemented in different Colombian contexts, the first one implemented in a school located in Bogotá, and the second one executed in primary and secondary grades in two schools in Montería, Cordoba. This review will be focused on the use of different techniques and the implementation of themes according to students' interests in order to enhance learners' oral participation in EFL lessons. Lastly, the present studies mainly focus on the causes and effects of learners' interest upon their linguistic performance, the different learning environments, and the impact they generate on language learners.

Having in mind the project "Improving Eleventh Graders' Oral Production in English Class through Cooperative Learning Strategies" developed by Prieto (2007) aimed to apply diverse procedures to enhance language learner's oral production in the EFL lessons; thus, the group of participants involved in this research were 53 eleventh grade students at *Colegio de Bachillerato Patria in Bogotá*. In this sense, the researcher collected data in this group by employing three different techniques: field notes, students and teachers' surveys, students' interviews and recordings to include what students found relevant, but researchers had not contemplated before. Once the data was analyzed, the researcher reported positive and negative effects that allowed them to develop, improve, and consider different elements in order to help students to increase their oral production.

Moreover, these findings proved that the students' reflection encouraged them to create their own language learning strategies to establish new goals in their learning process. To conclude, this research allowed us to raise awareness on how the use of different learning strategies are useful for EFL learners when they are thoughtfully addressed. In fact, these findings led us to carry out our classroom project based on the application of different techniques to help students enhance their oral production and to evidence the effects these methods might produce to university undergraduate students when learning English as a foreign language. Lastly, this research supports our emphasis to comprehend how learners' interests foster them to improve their language proficiency and increases their motivation to learn when being exposed to the foreign language.

Conversely to the inquiry executed by Prieto (2007), which used the cooperative learning as a main strategy in EFL learners' oral participation to help them to complete specific tasks or accomplish specific purposes by interacting with the language in an oral way, being engaged with the topics that are presented to them; furthermore, oral production was increased while students were taught with the topics of their preference, that is why, "Promoting language learning through a Thematic Vocabulary – Based syllabus in different grades" attained by Romero (2009) focused on deeply comprehending how vocabulary-based syllabus designed with different topics regarding students' interests, in other words theme based, raised learners' motivation due to the fact that they were engaged with the activities that were proposed to them, so they felt comfortable, and in this way, the outcomes reached in this project fulfilled the aim. This research was developed out with 105 students who were from primary and secondary grades in two schools in Monteria, one of the schools is public and the other is a private school that belongs to an ONG organization. To this end, participants showed interest in the activities

applied in each class, showing enthusiasm when replying to any command made by the researcher in the lessons.

In addition, relevant data was gathered in this project from the students, the coordinator, the principal, the English language facilitator, and the P.E.I (*Proyecto Educativo Institucional*) of the institution in which the project was developed. For this reason, in order to find reliable information, four pre-intervention stage procedures were implemented to collect data such as: a needs analysis in order to measure students' background and language proficiency; classroom observations, in which the data was gathered in a descriptive way for them to identify the target language improvement; questionnaires, as an instrument to gather and to tabulate the data of different groups and; lastly, interviews to describe language learners' experiences with the project. In addition, the researchers applied two different implementation stage procedures: first, stimulated recalls to gather data about the learners' perceptions in their language process and second, videotaping to analyze pedagogical aspects and language learners' attitudes when being exposed to the target language.

To conclude, considering that it has been challenging to find reliable first-hand literature concerning the impact different themes related to students' interests can generate on them when they are learning a foreign language; this research provided us with relevant supporting material to consider not only when developing our project, but also when carrying out our own teaching practices. Besides, based on the results consolidated in these two research articles we decided to classify them according to the necessities of our classroom project. Although both projects are reliable for the applicability of this study, we found some differences on the structure and the main focus that each project has. Firstly, "Improving Eleventh Graders' Oral Production in English Class through Cooperative Learning Strategies" project implemented by Prieto (2007)

was considered to be relevant since it mostly provided relevant input for this classroom project; nonetheless, it was not consistent enough in regards to how interesting themes were implemented and developed during the EFL instructions. It is mainly focused on the cooperative strategies that can be taken as part of the elicitation techniques to help students in their speaking skills improvement, so EFL learners can use the language in an oral way on each different scenario proposed in each class.

In contrast, “Promoting language learning through a Thematic Vocabulary – Based syllabus in different grades” research project applied by Romero (2009) was analyzed and chosen to be essential for our purpose since it deeply comprised two outstanding variables of affective factors impacting EFL learning such as oral participation and topic interest, which are interpreted in this study as having a direct connection, representing for this classroom project the most interesting perspective of all. In other words, this study used the theme based curriculum in order to make students feel interested, engaged, and motivated by implementing vocabulary through the application of different themes relating their own likes in each lesson. On the other hand, the two previous articles aimed to be the basis for our classroom project since both of them were reliable, contextualized, and related to our purpose. The fact that both of the referenced studies included different range of participants as the target population was significant for us not only because both projects aimed to enhance language learners’ oral participation, but also because we have experienced demotivation and selflessness when learning English because of the use of the uninteresting themes applied in the target language classes.

## **4. Methodology**

### **4.1 Context and Setting**

This classroom project took place in a four hours Saturday morning pre-intermediate English course three at the *Instituto de Lenguas Extranjeras*, ILEX, the academic dependency of the *Universidad Tecnológica de Pereira* in charge of providing the student population the necessary tools to reach a basic B2 level since the “*Acuerdo 06*” was signed on February 6th, 2001. Apart from being aligned with the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), the ILEX follows the Task-Based Instruction (TBI) and Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) as the standard approaches to guide English as a foreign language.

Besides, aiming to support learners to achieve the expected goals, the institution provides them with a computer lab and three audio-visual rooms to develop practical tasks. In addition, technological equipment such as tablets, video projectors, and speakers are lent to facilitators to develop language lessons. Lastly, although the University supplies EFL language learners with a lendable text-book, ILEX facilitators are allowed to use any material they consider relevant to incorporate in the learning environments.

### **4.2 Participants**

To start with, the current project involved a group of 23 male and female undergraduate learners, a teacher participant, and two non-participant observers. Also, it is paramount to mention that the involved student participants belong to different professional and technological programs offered by the University and that their ages range from 17 to 28 years. In addition, although the language learners enrolled in the course were undertaking different semesters, 26%

of them were in their second semester and most of them claimed they liked to play different table and video games, to do sports, to read, and to listen to music.

Furthermore, during the first semester of 2017 there were 61 English facilitators at the ILEX and their academic backgrounds ranged from being undertaking their B.A. in Language Teaching to holding a Master's degree. Although the teacher participant involved in this classroom project is currently undertaking his B.A. in Language Teaching, he had had previous teaching experience which allowed him to be selected to guide EFL lessons at the institute since January 2014. Lastly, the two non-participant observers part of the project could not only perceive relevant aspects regarding learners' interests and motivation to speak as well as the role different elicitation techniques played on triggering learners' oral participation, but were also able to individually plan one of the lessons to reflect about how they were implemented and how the language learners reacted towards their proposed tasks.

### **4.3 Implementation**

Aiming to assure English language, learners' likes and interests were addressed throughout the development of the current project, five class observations and an initial survey were applied before the implementation could take place. First, after having analyzed the student participants' results and based on the conclusions drawn from the survey, three thematic units were selected. The planned three units were aligned with certain linguistic items and a set of language learning elicitation techniques with the objective to trigger learners to orally interact with peers and to participate throughout nine sessions, which were focused on entertainment, healthy habits and sports, and future updates, respectively.

In addition, after having selected the themes and language items to be addressed, each of the language lessons built up knowledge through the usage of yes/no and display questions as well as through brainstorming, these in order to incorporate learners' prior knowledge and to prepare them for the upcoming tasks. Furthermore, the facilitator strengthened student participants' disposition by reuniting them in small groups to either share their opinions, discuss about particular issues, or even to make hypothesis about given situations which allowed to enhance learners' class interaction and oral participation. Consequently, after having guided learners throughout the engage and the study stages, the facilitator led them to meaningfully interact with language peers in tasks such as role-plays and debates.

To conclude, it is paramount to mention that after each of the language lessons had finished, every student participant was provided with a class questionnaire, which focused on having them reflect about their class oral participation and the reason(s) why of their consideration. Moreover, when learners had previously left, both none-observer participants as well as the teacher participant tabulated the data collected and discussed about their perceptions towards the EFL lesson and particularly the language learners' oral participation and contrasted their perceptions with that of the student participants before writing a class journal.

#### **4.4 Design**

Since the purpose of this classroom project is to determine whether through enhancing language learners' interests they feel more driven to participate in class, nine EFL lessons were planned and developed according to the backward approach proposed by Richards (2013), which refers to a specification of learning outputs in order to use them as the starting point for carrying out learning processes and input. In addition, the implemented teaching approach, the materials,

and the tasks were framed into the engage, study, and activate model (ESA) which allowed learners to follow certain steps in order to develop contextualized language.

Moreover, according to Harmer (2008), the ESA model delivers a clear teacher role in relation to the strong association oftentimes established in the academic setting. In fact, he mentioned that this model is appealing not only for teachers, but also for students due to the fact that it implements the study as a way of improving learners' four language skills and permits facilitators to control the steps and the content that will be utilized in the lessons. Hence, through implementing the ESA model, which in this case is pre-established to be followed by language instructors when lesson planning, EFL learners were able to grasp meaning and to increase their competences in order to interact with peers while rehearsing the target language.

#### **4.4.1 Assessment**

In regard to learners' class oral participation, it is essential to determine what assessment means in order to depict what the focus and criteria of this classroom project was; first, since according to Walvoord (n.d) assessment is a process through which decisions about curriculum and strategies are based in order to improve students' learning process, the main purpose of our assessment artifacts was to obtain qualitative and quantitative indications to lead the students to become more active class participants. Additionally, aiming to achieve the learning objectives, not only summative, but also formative assessment were implemented to assess learners' production when orally participating in class or developing oral language tasks, therefore after being exposed to the target language in each of the lessons, assessment instruments such as debates, role plays, interviews, and small group discussions were employed throughout the implementation.



Furthermore, formative assessment was selected since teamwork and peer correction as well as self-evaluations were employed with the purpose to determine the impact of each of the instruments and techniques over learners' oral production. Conversely, summative assessment was chosen in order to evaluate students' learning outcomes based on specific grading criteria, which were shared with and followed by language learners when developing language communication tasks that focused on the speaking skill.

#### **4.5 Informed Consent**

Thus, another aspect to highlight before the current classroom project implementation started, was the formal consent (see [appendix 1](#)) made to the ILEX institute in order for them to grant us the permission to apply our project in an English course 3. Therefore, after having the authorization from the institute, we informed language learners about the teacher's and the non-observers participants' role in the classroom by providing a consent letter (see [appendix 2](#)) with enough written information in Spanish to assure their understanding in order to diminish the pressure when making the decision about to be or not enrolled in this study. The majority of the students signed the consent letter giving us their honest participation maintaining their privacy with respect.

#### **4.6 Methods**

Also, regarding data collection methods, there were three stages which needed to be followed in order to achieve the expected results. First, the primary stage was developed aiming to get to know the student participants, to carry out an initial survey, and to pinpoint the themes to be implemented along three thematic units. Second, after having tabulated the data and when

defined the course content, the project could be implemented. In fact while developing the project the teacher participant and, in the end, the non-participant observers were in charge of planning the lessons, designing the material, and defining which elicitation techniques should be used to trigger learners to orally participate.

On the other, given the fact that different methods were planned to be used, while the teacher participant was in charge of guiding each language lesson, the two non-participant observers could focus on specific details regarding student participants' topic interests and oral participation such as students' responses and behaviors towards the proposed content and tasks. Consequently, aiming to triangulate the data gathered, after each of the language sessions had finished, student participants were provided with a class questionnaire (see [appendix 3](#)), both non-participant observers and the teacher participant discussed about their perceptions upon the language lesson, students' reactions, and elicitation techniques implemented in order to write a class journal which could reflect a more reliable scenario of what had previously occurred.

To conclude, after having observed the language learners and developed an initial survey, which determined the three thematic units to be explored, not only the implementation stage could be developed, but also the perception of the student participants' could be contrasted with those of the non-participant observers and the teacher participant's with the objective to write a reflective journal that along with a final random interview implemented with certain student participants allowed us to draw the results you will find in the next section.

## **5. Results**

After having analyzed the data collected throughout the different instruments used in this classroom project, this section aims to present the results obtained on how the use of different themes enhanced students' class oral participation. These will be presented into three different sections which will be depicted according to the strengths and challenges faced; first, professional growth that embraces classroom management, lesson planning, material design, elicitation techniques, theme of interest, and teamwork experiences; second, students' responses that includes code mixing and affective factors in oral production, learners' oral participation, and learners' responses to the course; third, linguistic outcomes that incorporates previous knowledge, grammar and vocabulary improvement through games, teaching grammar to assure learners' understanding, learners' disposition to the EFL lessons, and warm up for starting the classes. Lastly, based on the professional growth implications, diverse strengths and challenges faced throughout the EFL lessons will be included.

### **5.1 Professional Growth**

Planning the last three lessons independently influenced in the material design, and the techniques that we used to elicit information along the lessons. In fact, this helped us to be more efficient in the way we planned since it raised our awareness on how the positive and challenging implications when creating a class should be used as a way to improve our professional growth, some of them will be evidenced in the following statements.

Suggestions from two colleagues arose and allowed the last unit, "The Future is now", to impact not only EFL learners' linguistic responses, but also pre-service teachers' professional development, as it was stated by one of the observers who planned the eight lesson by saying that

“...this classroom project implementation has allowed me to reflect on how to prepare a class, to schedule the activities, and also to improve the time management for my future lesson plans...”

(Alejandro García - Journal Entry Eight, May 6th, 2017). With reference to the teaching role, our perception systematically changed due to the awareness of the different experiences lived inside the lessons, which were related to classroom management and teaching strategies, and also on how the constant reflection we had upon language learning aspects helped us to be better EFL teachers.

Although the constant reflection is important on activities that are included in the classes and the purposes that each of them have in the lesson planning, sometimes it can be time demanding. In fact, one of the observers not only claimed how she increased her own teaching practice but also her difficulties regarding time management as it is mentioned in sample (2).

(2) “To be a teacher does not only imply to know the subject to be taught, it also includes being willing to constantly improve oneself integrally, as much as updating the resources and materials one uses in teaching. When I was planning and creating the activities based on learners' interests, needs, and likes, these aspects took more time than I really expected, this led me to wonder: How much time do teachers have to invest in creating classroom material?...”

Jessica Álvarez - Journal Entry Nine, May 13th, 2017

One of the challenges that emerged in the lesson planning was that it took more time than the expected since the observers were used to plan two hours lessons, and in this case they had to plan a four hours class. Thus, we learned from this experience that the constant practicing when planning the lessons makes the class design not that complicated, which we consider is one of the main aspects to improve in our professional development.

### 5.1.1 Classroom Management

In addition, regarding the classroom management strategies that were implemented in the current project, they allowed us to develop the lessons by achieving our specific purpose that was to elicit students to orally participate with the use of engaging content along with different elicitation techniques. Besides, good classroom management strategies can guide language learners in their process when learning a foreign language, and it was evidenced in the teacher's performance by encouraging, modeling, and giving specific feedback to any task developed throughout the course. Some of the strategies used by the teacher were mentioned by one of the observers as is stated in sample (3).

(3) "... regarding the T's strategy I found it useful in order to help students brainstorm their knowledge about the countable and uncountable nouns by playing charades to practice. Here, the T allowed Ss to use the vocabulary they already knew and their body language was mixed with L1 & L2 to make themselves understood, and then to get the extra points..."

Alejandro García - Journal Entry 5th, April 8th, 2017

Hence, the same observer wrote another strategy observed some days later by saying that "Mixing Ss really worked, they went out of their comfort zone by making use of L2 to communicate with each other when they were separated and included in different groups..." (Alejandro García - Journal Entry Seven, April 29th, 2017). Certainly, being immersed in a scenario in which the teacher is another person, and two of us were inside the same scenario as non-participants-observers made us reflect upon our own teaching style.

In spite of waiting for positive responses in all the tasks by the learners, not all the engagement activities proposed to them were successful as we expected; this could be influenced because of the inappropriate planning of the class or the improper classroom management

strategies as the teacher mentioned by saying that “First, learners seemed to be lost in the first part of the lesson, the week off they had influenced their disposition and participation” (Mauricio Ramírez - Entry six, April 22nd, 2017). Also, another point of view was conceived by one of the observers in sample (6).

(6). “Besides, at the beginning of the class learners did not seem to be interested on the engagement activity where they had to cover their eyes with a scarf and recognize their partners by touching them, but despite of knowing that they should be silent , they laughed and talked to each other...”

Jessica Álvarez - Journal Entry Six, April 22nd, 2017

Related to the example provided above, when the activities did not work, it led us to look for the different factors that affected the purpose of the activity. In this case, we thought an effective class manager could empower the benefits of teaching-learning activities by differentiating the needs and components of the learners and by raising collective working and collaboration among students with related abilities and interests.

### **5.1.2 Lesson Planning**

In regard to the planning process, the inclusion of body language inside the EFL lessons boosted learners’ participation concerning the activities which included musical, historical, technological, and cultural content, as it can be seen in sample (7).

(7) “Furthermore, the inclusion of the target language as well as body language to boost learners’ participation on the activity called “Geopardy” included musical, historical, and cultural content and triggered class participants to actively communicate to get the extra points for their group.”

Alejandro García - Journal Entry Nine, March 11th, 2017

In fact, when planning the classes, we experienced that the lesson planning not only involved the class structure, but also the material creation and the constant searching for different manners to apply each task according to the learners' language level.

Some difficulties to understand the listening activities were faced by the students, and one of the most outstanding was due the accent or variety in terms of the speakers' pronunciation had in the audio played in class, so the teacher used this experience to reflect in his journal by mentioning that "... I can tell learners had some difficulties understanding an interview taken from a radio program, this because they are not used to listen to real language input..." (Mauricio Ramirez - Journal Entry One, March 11th, 2017). However, students understood the instructions and commands used by the teacher during the class; this aspect made us realize that students need to be more exposed to realia to improve not only their listening skill, but also their language learning process as a whole. For this reason, we decided to include audio material as news reports, interviews and videos about technology, video games and healthy habits which was aligned with their interests for them to get engaged while learning.

### **5.1.3 Material Design**

Besides, concerning the material design process, we went beyond to create the tasks inside the worksheets thinking as teachers and having in mind students' perceptions by identifying the strengths and weaknesses inside the material development. This situation increased our material creation skills in the academic setting, which we considered was one the major enriching experiences; it allowed us to recognize our strengths as the use of online sources for adapting the classroom material to improve in our professional ground, as it is highlighted by the teacher and one of the observers in samples (9) & (10).

(9) "...Lastly, I consider these last two lessons allowed the three of us (Alejandro García, Jéssica Álvarez, and myself) to grow professionally. We heard and considered each other's ideas, gave our opinions regarding the planned tasks, and provided valuable suggestions when planning and designing the material..."

Mauricio Ramírez - Journal Entry Nine, May 13th, 2017

(10) "...some students reacted in a positive way regarding the material, the slides, and the online platform that was created for them to answer a questionnaire; one of the Ss said "*Teacher, ustedes lo hicieron? Muy geníal*", and then another student replied "Yes, teacher. I want to use it"; I took this as feedback for us as materials designers, and also as a positive point to the project given the fact it was made according to their likes, and interests..."

Alejandro García - Journal Entry Nine, May 13th, 2017

With respect to the last samples, we considered that we learn more when we are exposed to different creation resources since it not only grants us to set standards, monitor our activities, or evaluate our performance to ensure the continuous improving, but also it makes us realize how important it is to use online websites to adapt our material and to keep into account students' feedback to enhance our class design. On the other hand, linking the grammatical units the institute required to be taught along with the content related to participants' likes was considered as one of the challenges faced in this classroom project since the material adaptation was exhausting and time consuming for the three of us. Besides, we evidenced that looking for the appropriate material regarding students' interests was longer than we expected, as one of the observers claimed in sample (11) & (12).

(11) "...designing a class for EFL learners is sometimes exhausting due to the hard labor when looking for material and more according to their interest, likes and needs, but I guess this was an enriching experience that will help me as a student and as a future professional."

Alejandro García - Journal Entry Eight, May 6th, 2017



(12) "... creating material in this context was at the beginning a stressing episode, first of all, because I did not know anything about video games, zodiac signs, and future updates. Secondly but not least important, the students and my partner's expectations were higher. Thus, I had to remake myself..."

Jessica Álvarez - Journal Entry Nine, May 13th, 2017

As teachers, we started being conscious of the class material design since it was exhausting in terms of finding the texts, audios, and other tasks implemented according to our purpose; however, we concluded that when teachers carefully design their class material, it can certainly be recycled for future EFL lessons. In fact, different means when trying to promote the EFL in class were used to provoke language learners to be active class participants.

#### **5.1.4 Elicitation Techniques**

In order to raise language learners' oral participation, a set of elicitation techniques were part of the main strengths identified in this classroom project due to the important role they had inside each lesson. In fact, when applying different elicitation techniques as open, and display questions as well as grouping techniques allowed learners to be engaged with the themes used in the lessons developed. Besides, learners were evoked to actively participate after using these techniques which was our main purpose as one of the observers wrote in his entry by saying that "Some elicitation techniques I perceived from the T were open questions, peer work, matching partners, mingle, and display questions in order to involve Ss with the class and elicit their oral participation..." (Alejandro García - Journal Entry Nine, May 13th, 2017).

According to the example given above, these techniques allowed us to perceive how interested students were to be part of the class using the foreign language. In fact, students shared

their own ideas related to the specific content in class individually or in groups after being evoked to orally participate. These set of strategies could be implemented in our future lessons in order to foster the use of EFL permitting them to speak no matter their mistakes; nevertheless, the most suitable procedures need to be chosen with caution in order to apply them in the appropriate way.

On the other hand, although the procedures used when addressing students gave them the opportunity to take advantage of the oral activities to practice the language, there were some situations in which learners were apparently lost in relation to the way how they were elicited to participate, one example was stated by one of the observers in sample (13).

(13) “Today, learners had the opportunity to reflect on their perspectives by teacher questions as: “Is there any relation between: what we eat, society and how we perceive ourselves”. Then, they should draw themselves and answer other questions: Who is the person that you admire the most? And why could someone admire you? They seemed to be confused with these questions and a big part of the group did not know what to answer.”

Jessica Álvarez - Journal Entry Six, April 22nd, 2017

When we reflected upon this events we concluded that language learners’ low vocabulary limited them to express what they really wanted to share in the class. This was observed in learners when they had an idea, but they did not have enough lexicon to explain their point of view, so they started hesitating, using body language, and moving anxiously. For this reason, we created oral activities aligned with topics they enjoyed working with, so they can be related to the content used and feel motivated to be active class participants.

### 5.1.5 Theme of Interest

Furthermore, another strength in the implementation of this classroom project included the topics based on students' interests, which were collected in the questionnaire made at the beginning of the course. Since the lessons focused on themes related to learners' likes, interests and because the grammatical content was implicitly taught, EFL learners were engaged and willing to orally participate. In fact, one of the events observed by the teacher when guiding the fourth unit "Healthy habits" exemplifies how much the selection of the topics impacts learners' participation, one event was referenced by the teacher in his journal by saying that "... since in the first survey learners mentioned they enjoyed hanging out with friends to either eat, have a drink, or chat, it boosted them to be more active class participants" (Mauricio Ramirez - Entry 4, April 1st, 2017).

The example previously mentioned, allowed us to be aware of the significance that planning the lessons based on students' likes and interests has when aiming to promote the use of English in class by making use of different scenarios they are part of. Moreover, in the "Extreme sports" unit, one of the observers wrote her point of view of the lesson by mentioning that "...students seemed to be interested and engaged with the theme due to a big part of the group was actively participating by answering all the questions" (Jessica Álvarez - Journal Entry Six, April 22nd, 2017). It was crucial for us to expand the way how these features granted student's motivation to orally participate since a good learning environment influenced language learners to feel confident.

Nonetheless, given the fact that carrying out all the themes related to students' likes and interests was not possible, we tabulated the information gathered and selected the most common topics they preferred. However, since we did not know much about the selected topics, planning

the lessons based on the selected themes was the most challenging part. In fact, we had to search, read, and adapt material for the lessons and one of the observers talked about this process by stating that “I found many issues regarding the material given the fact that when I started writing the lesson I did not find something related to the Ss’ interests, so I felt frustrated because I wanted to make the class appealing to the students for them to be engaged” (Alejandro García - Journal Entry Eight, May 6th, 2017).

From the previous example, we learned from this implementation that fulfilling all the students’ likes requirements involved is not straightforward due to the hard labor it was. In this case, we had to be informed of the topic first, then design and finally create and examine if it was convenient to be implemented in the class. Lastly, our professional skills were strengthened since we not only verified how positive it is to carefully select the content to be explored; besides, how motivating it was for learners to notice the class was related to their likes, needs, and realities, and also how enriching it is to work with colleagues.

#### **5.1.6 Teamwork Experiences**

In particular, this classroom project allowed us to reflect on how relevant it was to work as a team, independently of the differences each one of us had. It granted us the opportunity to learn that we should listen to each other, analyze our points of view, and consider the most suitable ideas recognizing that the three of us could suggest good quality input; also, suggesting different plans concerning the lesson and material design contributed to our personal growth due to the experiences each one of us had in different fields such as sports, dance, and academy knowledge to be applied in the classes.

However, we had some difficulties regarding the communication when we wanted to explain our desire on how we wanted the next class to be; one situation that happened in the ninth implementation was related to the planning process in which the teacher and one of the observers had trouble when organizing one of the proposed tasks. The teacher mentioned the situation faced by saying that “when it comes to the planning process, today’s lesson was designed by Jessica; however, I made a slight change and I had to develop a task which was not completed by her.” (Mauricio Ramirez - Entry 9, May 6th, 2017).

Regarding the previous sample and the lesson planning, having three different perspectives when creating the class caused interference since the three of us are used to plan differently, so we tended to have diverse perceptions according to what was being planned for each class; besides, scheduling the time to meet and plan the activities was another issue due to other university requirements we had while implementing this classroom project. In consequence, we learned to work with patience and according to each other’s time availability to plan and design the activities. Also, we learned not to underestimate suggestions made by colleagues who gave us innovative ideas to be applied in order to maintain our focus.

## **5.2 Students’ Responses**

This section aims to provide a general view of what we found throughout the implementation of this classroom project emphasizing on how the implemented themes, techniques, and strategies impacted learners' performance. In fact, the strengths and limitations learners faced during their participation in this classroom project will be explained to provide a broader perspective of what they experienced in different situations inside the class; we will illustrate how a set of different themes increased language learners’ oral participation.

### 5.2.1 Code Mixing and Affective Factors in Oral Production

In terms of language learners' reactions, we evidenced that students' adapted the use of their native language to complete their ideas; this act was completed by a set of affective factors that influenced their oral participation when being in class. One relevant aspect in this case was perceived when language learners started participating without worrying about the vocabulary they did not know. This allowed them to create strategies in order to make themselves understood when speaking; one strategy used by the participants was the use of their native language to replace the unknown words in the foreign language. This situation was evidenced since the first implementation as one of the observers indicated in sample (15).

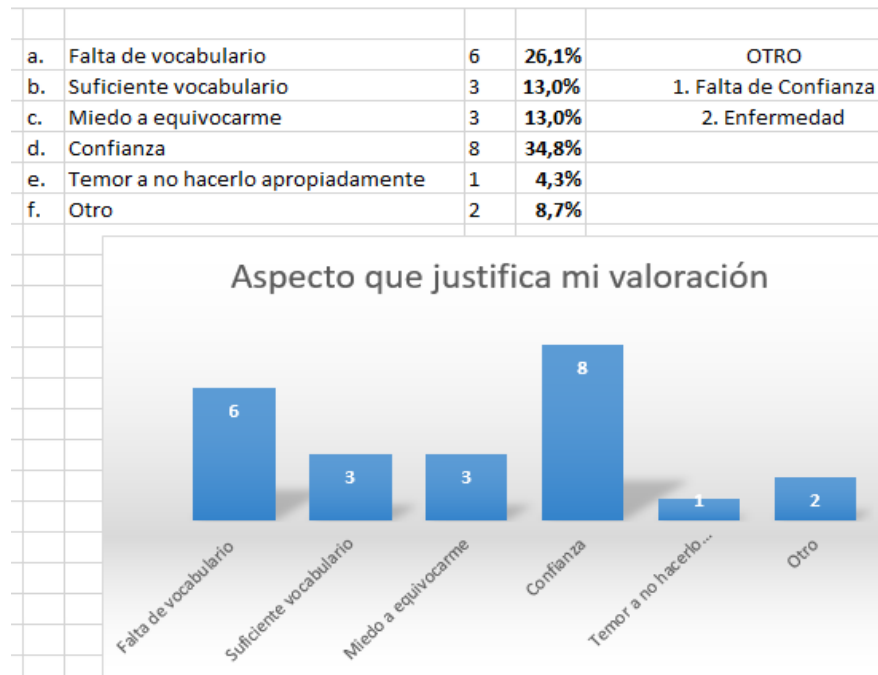
(15) "Despite their lack of vocabulary in certain subjects, they keep talking and sharing their ideas even though they have to use words in L1. In fact, when trying to make themselves understood, class participants not only employed L1 to replace unknown words, but also used body language in each of the planned activities, which has facilitated their comprehension."

Jessica Álvarez - Journal Entry One, March 11th, 2017

Indeed, students' lack of vocabulary did not prevent them from sharing their points of view, which we considered as a positive aspect since we, as teachers, concluded that the use of their native language should be considered as a relevant tool to assure their understanding when speaking. Nevertheless, one of the most common difficulties learners faced inside the classroom was to speak in public due to their fear of making mistakes; we observed students were anxious when they had to complete oral tasks being this mood an impediment for them to orally communicate. Thereby, this situation led them to speak Spanish as it was evidenced in the questionnaire answered by the students at the end of the second class, in which the 13,0% of the

learners selected that “*Miedo a equivocarme*” was one of their major fears when they were elicited to orally participate (See figure 1).

**2. La valoración de mi producción oral se basa en el siguiente aspecto**



**Figure 1.** Statistics of the second class questionnaire - March 18th, 2017.

Related to the previous figure, one of the observers referred to these aspects in sample (16).

(16) “...considering the data collected in the questionnaire, it led me to reflect on fears and limitations such as the lack of vocabulary to speak in public and the mistakes learners make when orally participating. Based on the questionnaire results analyzed today, it was evidenced that the lack of vocabulary 26, 1%, of language learners fear to be wrong 13%, fear to not do it properly 4, 3% influenced learners’ oral participation.”

Jessica Álvarez, Journal Entry Two - March 18th, 2017

Regarding the samples given before, learners’ lack of vocabulary made them switch into Spanish when they wanted to complete an idea, which was not considered a problem in general since it was their tool to finish what they wanted to say. As a result, we agreed on the idea the teacher wrote in his journal by saying that “...there is a point in which, I believe, some learners get really

involved and want to express themselves through the use of English but feel limited, and they end up switching to Spanish”. (Mauricio Ramirez, Journal Entry Two - March 18th, 2017).

However, when learners started using their native language to fulfill their low foreign language lexicon in the foreign language started to be a challenge for the three of us since the foreign language use could not be perceived through the oral tasks implemented; this situation led us to reflect on the learners’ difficulties when orally participating since their desire to communicate made them use Spanish as the primary source. Finally, this experience allowed us to consider that being on the spot is not that easy and more when there is not enough vocabulary to express a complete idea in the foreign language.

### **5.2.2 Learners’ Oral Participation**

Diverse themes related to students’ interests implemented in this classroom project helped learners to feel motivated to orally participate when feeling engaged with a specific topic. This allowed them to feel comfortable and to take the risk to participate without fearing to do it since the themes were related to their own likes, as it was mentioned by one of the observers in sample (18).

(18) “... Learners’ reactions towards the proposed tasks during today’s lesson was particularly positive, they seemed to be motivated and they frequently participated. Also, they apparently felt no fear to orally participate or to express themselves in public, and though they had some grammatical mistakes, it did not prevent them from being understood.”

Mauricio Ramírez - Journal Entry Nine, May 13th, 2017

With reference to the previous sample, we concluded that when the use of elicitation techniques aligned with the specific themes are properly implemented, it can increase learners’ motivation to participate in class and greatly reduce their anxiety to speak. Nevertheless, one



challenge faced during the implementation of this classroom project was the students' fear to be wrong and the mistakes they could make when orally participating as it was highlighted by one of the observers in sample (19)

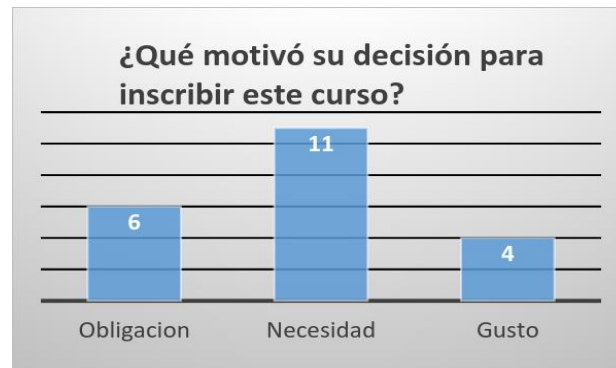
(19) "...learners are not aware about the great importance mistakes play when learning a foreign language. If learners could take advantage of their mistakes, they could improve their linguistic competence and therefore become more active language users..."

Jessica Álvarez - Journal Entry Two, March 18th, 2017

Besides, the previous sample allowed us to conclude that taking risks to speak without worrying about the mistakes made is what allows language learners to become more fluent. After all, the practice plays a main role in the language learning process since it guides students to feel motivated to learn although there are some moments in which they are afraid to speak in public or to someone else. Finally, learning a language not only takes time, but also involves language learners to constantly improve their linguistic competence through making conscious self-corrections.

### **5.2.3 Learners' Positive Responses to the Course**

According to the questionnaire implemented at the beginning of the course, 6 of 21 EFL learners who were enrolled in the course considered they were undertaking it because they were obliged (See figure 2); however, throughout the course development they started to change their attitude responding positively towards the proposed tasks.



**Figure 2.** Statistics about students' motivation to take the course, from the questionnaire made at the beginning of the course.

In addition, their behavior began to be different due to certain factors such as the integration of themes related to their likes, and in this case one of the class participants mentioned how interesting the theme was by saying "*Me interesó el tema tratado.*" (Learners' general perception: Questionnaires - Entry Six, April 22nd, 2017). In the same sense, one of the observers who was in charge of planning the lesson number nine mentioned positive comments she listened from the students regarding the material she created which was aligned with a specific theme used in class by saying that "I achieved positive responses because the material I designed was linked to students' linguistic competences, interests and needs, so they expressed how they liked the worksheets, the PowerPoint presentations, and the video used in the listening task." (Jessica Álvarez - Journal Entry Nine, May 13th, 2017).

Concerning the previous sample, different points of view from the students allowed us to raise awareness about the importance of knowing the reasons for learners to take this course, and to analyze how much their perceptions positively changed throughout the lessons based on the questionnaires implemented at the end of each class. Finally, it led us to corroborate that by designing language lessons based on students' likes, needs, and interests empowered them to orally participate in class.

### **5.3 Linguistic Outcomes**

This chapter was developed according to the communicative competence and its implications in students' performance. This classroom project was focused on the linguistic outcomes gathered from the participants who grasped the complexity of the foreign language as a communication system. Therefore, this section derives from nine implemented lessons aiming to help students to enhance their oral participation by exposing them to different thematic units along with certain grammatical components. This will be divided into five segments such as previous knowledge, grammar and vocabulary improvement through games, teaching grammar to assure learners' understanding, learners' disposition to the EFL lessons, and warm up to starting the classes in which we will describe the strengths and challenges faced of each category.

#### **5.3.1 Previous Knowledge**

To guide participants in their language learning process, we created the lessons by using the brainstorming technique at the beginning of each class in order to remind students about the linguistic units and the topic already developed. In fact, we perceived that learners took advantage of this technique by remembering what had been previously explored such as content and grammatical structures. One event about this technique was recorded in the third implementation of this classroom project in which the teacher stated that "At the beginning of the class, learners could practice not only the past simple linguistic and pronunciation patterns, but they also meaningfully interacted by using their previous knowledge." (Mauricio Ramírez - Journal Entry Three, March 25th, 2017).

Moreover, we identified that this plan allowed learners to review the vocabulary linked to different themes developed in prior lessons. It also engaged students by allowing them to remember grammar rules regarding the theme used in class, and their prior knowledge about general culture facts. In the same sense, the teacher used a similar case mentioned in sample (20).

(20) "...since learners needed to accurately use the past simple to form some questions to then be allowed to answer them (Jeopardy), they were able to meaningfully rehearse their linguistic and pragmatic competence while thinking about music, literature, art, science, among other categories."

Mauricio Ramírez - Journal Entry One, March 11th, 2017

Based on the previous sample, we concluded that the use of activities that incorporate topics related to participants' programs such as arts, mathematics, music, science, and sports allowed them to keep motivated and less anxious when using the foreign language orally. Nevertheless, one challenge faced when using this technique was the low lexicon students had and the short time to practice the vocabulary learned. In this case, one sample was stated by the teacher who said that "...I consider the upcoming classes need to incorporate vocabulary sections through which language learners can enrich their lexicon before actually speaking about certain topics." (Mauricio Ramírez - Journal Entry Two, March, 18th, 2017).

Although we gave them the spaces to improve their vocabulary as in the "Cuisine for a class" & "Create your futuristic gadget" by guiding them to use the vocabulary they reviewed in class, students faced an adverse situation in which they had to memorize some words due to their pronunciation and the anxiousness that caused for them to be on the spot. Indeed, as a team we concluded that using oral tasks according to the participant's interests as the use of video games and

future inventions, elicited them in a positive way through making them to orally practice with the subjects they had certain knowledge about.

### **5.3.2 Grammar and Vocabulary Improvement through Games**

Also, in order to review learners' previous knowledge, a set of games such as Bingo, Charades, and Jenga were implemented aiming to study certain grammatical patterns. These games demonstrated that they are feasible if they are well planned and adapted to achieve a specific goal as it was highlighted by one of the observers by saying that "Regarding the T's strategy, I found it useful in order to help students brainstorm their knowledge about the countable and uncountable nouns by playing charades to practice..." (Alejandro García - Journal Entry Five, April 8th, 2017). In fact, it allowed learners to use the vocabulary they already knew and their body language to make themselves understood. Moreover, these games were a set of useful strategies implemented in this classroom project to practice grammatical components. This perspective was evidenced in one of the journals in which one of the observers referred to it in sample (21).

(21) "I considered useful the use of games in the classroom with the purpose to review and practice the tenses due to we not only employed Bingo for reviewing the verbs in past, but also Jenga for practicing will and be going to, where learners could write sentences in order to differentiate the use of will and be going to. It is a joyful activity to review what was carried out in class and it is based on the questionnaire implemented at the beginning of the course in which they expressed their interests in different kind of games."

Jessica Álvarez - Journal Entry Seven, April 29th, 2017

Considering the previous example, the use of games in the classroom aiming to review some grammatical items as verbs in past, the use of will and be going to in a dynamic way.

However, some challenges were faced in the implementation of these games due to the learners' fear to pronounce the verbs in past and the low desire they showed during the writing tasks developed when playing these games. The first case was noticed by one of the observers who stated that "part of the group looked uncomfortable when the teacher asked them to read aloud because they frown their foreheads especially when they had to read the verbs in past tense" (Jessica Álvarez - Journal Entry Four, April 1st, 2017).

Moreover, a second case was expressed by the same observer by saying that "she expressed her dislike about writing tasks by saying: *¡A mi no me gusta escribir, qué pereza!*" (Jessica Álvarez - Journal Entry Nine, May 13th, 2017). In fact, having in mind the last sample, we should take into consideration these kind of aspects that influence learners' performance by building consciousness not only about the importance of taking risks to receive pronunciation feedback when reading, but also about the significance of incorporating different skills such as writing in these games.

### 5.3.3 Teaching Grammar to Assure Learners' Understanding

Regarding the grammatical component, teachers should introduce to learners essential grammar in context and in distinct ways such as oral tasks by giving them what they need, rather than boring them with "the rules". This aspect was evidenced after their oral presentations about different food, in the activity called "Cuisine for a class", where they expressed their understanding about countable and uncountable nouns when they had to answer a worksheet in which an observer recorded one situation in sample (22):

(22) "In the study section, they were doing the worksheet which allowed them to be aware of the differences between *"a / an"*, *"some/ any"*, and *"much / many"*. Some of their expressions demonstrated their understanding through the

activity and teachers' explanations as "*Es uncountable, claro*", "*Ahh sí, es verdad*" "*Ok, ya entiendo*" in which one student correctly answered 22 questions orally."

Jessica Álvarez - Journal Entry Five, April 8th, 2017.

The main purpose of the class mentioned in the previous sample, was to introduce countable and uncountable nouns by guiding learners to comprehend not only the linguistic patterns, but also their different uses. In fact, the oral presentations such as "Cuisine for a class" allowed students to demonstrate their awareness about the form and the use.

In fact, taking into consideration the complex syntactic structures and idiomatic constructions that are rare or absent in Spanish can be challenging for learners. For that reason, some of the learners had difficulties differentiating the use of will and be going as one of the observes mentioned in her journal "...some learners seemed to be confused when writing the sentences by recognizing the differences between will and be going to..." (Jessica Álvarez - Journal Entry Eight, May 6th, 2017). For that reason, it is necessary to expose learners to different interesting tasks by providing different explanations throughout the activities to assure their understanding with the grammatical units.

#### **5.3.4 Learners' Disposition to the EFL Lessons**

In the application of this classroom project we realized that language learners' conduct changed each class as they started getting involved with the language. The participants initiated to be active class participants when they perceived the topics developed in class were related to the themes they mentioned in the questionnaire, and also when they were associated with the different language units in which they learned how to ask, to answer, and to use simple sentences orally. In fact, one of the observers registered a situation concerning this aspect by saying that

“Ss learned some words related to how to ask and answer, because when the T asked: “Do you know what this word means?” then one learner said: “Yes, teacher, it is...” giving the correct meaning.” (Alejandro García - Journal Entry Six, April 22nd, 2017).

Respecting the previous sample, we concluded that allowing students to practice the grammar inside the themes used granted them to interpret and analyze how the language functions learned in class could be applied to communicate in the foreign language. Nevertheless, when language learners felt their lexicon was not enough to express what they wanted, their behavior changed by showing their anxiety through the overuse of any word or repetitive movements. Concerning this situation, one observer registered a similar situation in the “Cuisine for a class” activity in which students had to present any type of food they chose in groups by presenting its name, ingredients, and preparation as it is shown in sample (22).

(22) “... I perceived S2 was anxious when presenting his dessert in “Cuisine for a class”, sometimes he stopped for reading the paper he had in his hands in order to remember what he had to say according to what he prepared. I noticed that Ss normally get anxious when they have to face any particular situation in which they have to be in front of the class presenting or just when they have to be involved in a role play activity.”

Alejandro García - Journal Entry 5, April 8th, 2017

Regarding the previous example, we reflected on how important it is to feel fear to be wrong since it is the beginning to be better language users; thus, it is the way to become conscious about the mistakes made when speaking. Although being afraid is a normal mood when being on the spot, shy personalities in the EFL setting should be taken into account when planning the lessons in order to guide them and thus improve the anxiety caused when speaking aloud. For this reason, the inclusion of different strategies as peer interaction, mingle, and presentations were used in this classroom project to help learners to enhance their speaking skill.



### 5.3.5 Warm Up for Starting the Classes

Students need a chance to settle down into the class and to get their minds focused on the lesson. For this reason, a warm-up before delivering any knowledge to students is necessary to help them to follow the thread of the class. In this case, when learners were exposed to warm up activities to review and to learn new vocabulary, they were more prepared for the lesson by creating a positive atmosphere to practice and experiment with the language, as it was mentioned by one of the observers by mentioning that “I saw that Ss are willing to participate more when they have some idea about the theme, because they could know some vocabulary related to it allowing them to participate in the oral, reading, listening or writing tasks...” (Alejandro García - Journal Entry 6, April 22nd, 2017).

Considering the previous example, a fun warm up raises energy levels by provoking relaxed, less inhibited students to participate in English as much as they can. In this case, as teachers, we need to slowly incorporate students into learning, implementing something simple that becomes partially complex in their learning process. Nevertheless, learners might not have spoken English since the last session. Even if your students encounter and use English every weekend, it still takes some time to prepare for the intensive four hours of class time as it is evidenced in sample (24).

(24) “...as a final reflection, I found out I should have planned and implemented a more dynamic task to start the class through which they could have been able to review the previous topic, this because they were not in contact with English for two weeks, approximately.”

Mauricio Ramirez - Journal Entry 6, April 22nd, 2017

Without enough time to get warmed up, students will continue to make mistakes during the early stages of the lesson due to the main role time plays since it is needed to learn, to practice,

and to improve what was studied. As it happened in one of the lessons in which the teacher wrote that “learners seemed to be lost in the first part of the lesson, the week off they had influenced their disposition and participation” (Mauricio Ramirez - Journal Entry 6, April 22nd, 2017). In this case, no matter how much motivated learners are, they should always be warmed up and briefly review previously explored topics in order not to lose the route and to keep their desire to learn.

## 6. Conclusions and Implications

This classroom project aimed to show the influence of diverse themes on students' oral participation towards the EFL lessons at the Instituto de Lenguas Extranjeras, ILEX, in Pereira. After having collected and analyzed the data through observations, questionnaires, and journals (see [appendix 4](#)), we concluded that themes such as entertainment, healthy habits, leisure activities, and the future world impacted in a high degree the motivation of the students. In fact, we perceived that students tended to participate more actively responding to the teacher's commands due to the strategies implemented.

This classroom project evidenced how the theme-based approach, aligned with the use of elicitation techniques, allowed students to participate more actively when creating the lessons and activities based on their interests to foster their willingness to orally participate; in contrast, Forero (2005) concluded that it required the application of a set of strategies to keep learners' motivation such as the constant change of the activities, the use of creative and colorful flashcards and the design of a flexible lesson plan. Although his focus was task-based approach, in our case, we found that not only the use of theme-based approach, but also the constant change of topics, tasks, and elicitation techniques planned in a flexible lesson plan influenced the learners' desire to orally participate when being enrolled in oral tasks.

Regarding the theme-based approach mentioned before, we concluded that the themes that were particularly interesting for language learners helped them to improve their oral interaction each class. In fact, during the implementation of the current project, learners were elicited to use their previous knowledge through oral warm-up activities in order for them to have a starting input before going to the productive skills. We evidenced that speaking is a skill which involves more than making the correct sound, selecting the appropriate words or procuring

the grammatically correct constructions (Chastain, 1998). In this case, we concluded that students should be exposed to the topics before the actual production so that they can use that input in the target language when being involved in speaking activities in a later stage.

Indeed, through each task used, we noticed that when students had the appropriate input, they used the target language by employing their previous knowledge in a correct way. Thus, they understood that after all, practice makes perfect, and the language learning process not only takes time, but also requires learners to constantly improve their linguistic competence through making conscious self-corrections as it was stated by Benitt (2015): “Self-correction demonstrates comprehension and responsibility for the language. It builds awareness of the language, in turn leading to more self-sufficient speakers. It makes students more confident speakers too. With the large effect of these positives, teachers should want to strive towards students who can correct themselves” (p. 86).

Furthermore, we realized that the application of different themes also required the use of a set of games as bingo, charades, and Jenga aligned with cooperative learning strategies allowing learners to practice the grammar units and also to foster them to orally participate; as a result, different students expressed how the topics and games implemented in class helped them for improving their oral skill when being enrolled in the course (See videos [1](#), [2](#), [3](#), [4](#), [5](#), and [6](#)). We can also claim that the use of the questionnaire given at the end of each lesson helped students to keep reflecting on their oral participation process by identifying their strengths and limitations when orally participating.

Additionally, regarding implications, we evidenced that there were two main reasons why learners did not practice speaking which included the lack of vocabulary, and the fear to be wrong when being on the spot. For this reason, the application of oral tasks should also implicate

the creation of an environment where mistakes are part of students' learning process allowing them to use the foreign language without limitations.

On a different matter, we realized that oral tasks required a set of elicitation techniques aligned with diverse themes for improving participants' oral production; we perceived that language learners enjoyed activities employed to promote the foreign language use, since they felt comfortable and motivated to use English in the class by expressing themselves without the pressure of grades or other students' opinions. It is also important to mention that their oral performance became more visible due to the fact that they dealt with topics that prompted spontaneous oral participation by raising learners' desire to express their opinions while learning.

Moreover, when developing this classroom project, we did not have inconveniences regarding the place or the permission requested to the ILEX institute. However, we faced some limitations regarding EFL lessons development. One of these was related to the Institute's requirements where this project was developed since it has its own proposed curriculum that all teachers should follow. For that reason, it took a lot of time to triangulate the plan of the lesson, the requirements and the purpose of the project. In fact, another limitation was mainly related to the class material design due to the fact that we did not have enough resources to create the tasks for the students since we had to design and adapt the material we found due to the low resources available to be used in the lessons.

Although this classroom project reached its main objective, that was to explore a set of themes to strengthen language learners' oral production, certain topics, activities, and strategies that could help students to improve their oral skill due to the time constraint we had could not be included. However, for other future practitioners or teachers aiming to implement theme-based approach as their major aim, the age and gender variables of the students should be taken into

account when selecting the themes to be used since we did not included them in this classroom project's main purpose.

On the other hand, the use of speaking as an assessment strategy was not a viable way to motivate students to orally participate since it did not encourage real communication in the classroom and it was also a factor that elicited students' anxiety since it was employed for assessment purposes instead of natural interaction. Therefore, the results of this classroom project highlighted the need for implementing interesting oral tasks and strategies aiming to increase learners' oral participation, acknowledging the importance that learners' motivation should have in the teachers' methodology; for this reason, the use of games and activities where learners can interact with each other in English can influence their desire to learn the foreign language; besides, the use of interesting topics can enhance learners' self-confidence in which they can review the vocabulary or grammar they may need for the upcoming tasks.

Concerning the previous information, we stated that in the process of learning a foreign language, it is crucial for teachers to include strategies which help increase students' desire to orally participate. Thus, we consider that maintaining students motivated during the development of the classes is a factor that needs to be taken into account in the methodology used by the teachers. As a conclusion, we suggest to carry out a needs analysis or a survey to find out which the learners' needs, likes, and interests are in order to plan a successful lesson by using a set of elicitation techniques in dynamic activities to prompt language learners' oral participation.

Besides, another issue regarding the oral tasks spaces was related to the permission requested to develop the fifth lesson called "Cuisine for a class" in a place called the "Kiosko" inside the UTP; the petition took more than one month and a half to be accepted; therefore, the activity had to be postponed several times and the other lessons had to be re-planned delaying the

path of the project. Lastly, when the non-observers participants had to plan the four-hour class was another limitation, since they had not had the experience of planning a four-hour lesson by finding, designing, and incorporating tasks for each stage of the class; indeed, the time we had when finding and designing the material related to the classroom project aim was short since the three of us had different schedules and other responsibilities; in this case, scheduling the meetings to contrast our views/perspectives of each lesson, read students comments and write the journal was an obstacle for us regarding how demanding was to gather, analyze and reflect on the different aspects related to this classroom project development.





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## Appendix 1

January 13, 2017

Dear professor González,

We are seeking your consent to implement the graduation project entitled '*Topic interest as a learning construct to elicit learners' oral participation in EFL lessons*' with a Saturday course 3 at the Instituto de Lenguas Extranjeras, ILEX. This project will be carried out to fulfill a requirement for the degree of B.A in the teaching of English as a foreign language, and it aims to inform about the applicability of implementing a set of thematics along with elicitation techniques to provoke learners' interest to orally participate. Furthermore, it will involve video and audio recording of learners' performance in oral tasks, which will only be done upon learners' respective consent. In addition, formal observations, reflective journals, learners' self-evaluations and two questionnaires will be developed to collect data.

As part of an ethical approach to this study, we assure you that:

- EFL learners will not be forced to participate in the study.
- The study will not disturb the teacher's and language learners' duty.
- EFL learners' names will not be revealed during the project so that they can freely express opinions and participate in the study.

To ensure confidentiality and protection of the language learners, we promise that:

- Audio visual data will only be used for research or educational purposes.
- You may ask to see and be informed about the data collected through this study.
- You may request parts of the study not to be shown or socialized.

Thank you for considering this project to be undertaken at the Instituto de Lenguas Extranjeras.

Yours sincerely,

Jéssica Juliana Álvarez

Luis Alejandro García

Edison Mauricio Ramírez

Students of ninth semester of Licenciatura en lengua inglesa.

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María Clemencia González  
Responsable Coordinador

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Jéssica Juliana Álvarez

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Luis Alejandro García

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Edison Mauricio Ramírez

## Appendix 2

### FORMULARIO DE CONSENTIMIENTO INFORMADO PARA ESTUDIANTES Licenciatura en Bilingüismo con Énfasis en Inglés Universidad tecnológica de Pereira

**Título del proyecto:** *"Topic interest as a learning construct to elicit learners' oral participation."*

**Investigadores:**

**Nombre:** Jéssica Juliana Álvarez Taborda

**Teléfono:** 3013439161

**E-mail:** [jessicaj@utp.edu.co](mailto:jessicaj@utp.edu.co)

**Nombre:** Luis Alejandro García Osorio

**Teléfono:** 3185448873

**E-mail:** [alejandrogo19974@gmail.com](mailto:alejandrogo19974@gmail.com)

**Nombre:** Edison Mauricio Ramírez Ramírez

**Teléfono:** 3206461922

**E-mail:** [mauricio.ramirez@utp.edu.co](mailto:mauricio.ramirez@utp.edu.co)

**Estimado (a) Estudiante:**

Cumpliendo con uno de los requisitos de grado, se llevará a cabo el proyecto de clase denominado *"Topic interest as a learning construct to elicit learners' oral participation"*, por lo cual extendemos de manera formal la invitación a participar en este estudio, el cual tiene como propósito demostrar la influencia ejercida por las temáticas en la participación oral de los estudiantes universitarios en clase.

Adicionalmente, tenga en cuenta que debido a la naturaleza del proyecto, se aplicará una encuesta de reconocimiento al inicio, así como un cuestionario al finalizar cada clase con el propósito de identificar patrones relacionados con su perfil que pudieron haber influenciado su participación oral en determinadas sesiones. Asimismo, a lo largo del proyecto habrá dos observadores, los cuales no intervendrán en el desarrollo pleno de las actividades de clase. Finalmente, eventualmente se recolectará material audiovisual que será utilizado como evidencia y con fines únicamente académicos, para así generar conocimiento basado en investigación que oriente el mejoramiento de la calidad de las experiencias de enseñanza y aprendizaje.

De otro lado, es para nosotros fundamental asegurarle que la información obtenida y sus resultados en el presente estudio serán confidenciales, por lo cual su identidad permanecerá anónima. De hecho, cuando la evidencia deba ser expuesta, su nombre real así como su información será únicamente conocida por los encargados del desarrollo del proyecto y ésta será almacenada de manera tal que sólo los investigadores tengan acceso a ella.

Finalmente, ya que su participación es voluntaria, no será remunerada y no implica ningún riesgo previsible, si por algún motivo en algún momento usted decide no ser parte del proyecto, podrá informar a los encargados acerca de su decisión para no ser tenido en cuenta dentro de los resultados finales del mismo. Para concluir, en caso de tener alguna duda frente al proyecto, usted podrá contactarnos a través de los teléfonos y correos previamente

suministrados o personalmente ya sea después de clase en el salón JUL-B01, la oficina 12-402 ó 12-409 en la Facultad de Bellas Artes y Humanidades.

**Declaración de los investigadores:**

Hemos explicado y discutido con los participantes este estudio en su totalidad, hemos contestado todas sus preguntas y aclarado sus dudas.

**Firmas de los Investigadores:**

\_\_\_\_\_  
Jéssica Juliana Álvarez T.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Luis Alejandro García O.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Edison Mauricio Ramírez

**Fecha:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Consentimiento del estudiante:**

He leído toda la información proporcionada en este formulario de consentimiento Informado y todas mis preguntas y dudas fueron contestadas, por lo cual voluntariamente acepto participar en este estudio.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Nombre completo del participante

\_\_\_\_\_  
Firma del participante

## Appendix 3



**Inglés**  
**Curso 3-31**  
**Sábados**



Nombre: \_\_\_\_\_

Fecha: \_\_\_\_\_

1. Cuando estoy en clase de inglés y siento que debo participar activamente, lo logro en una escala de:

Poco	Justo	Bueno	Muy bueno	Excelente
1	2	3	4	5

2. La valoración de mi producción oral se basa en el siguiente aspecto:

a. Falta de vocabulario		b. Suficiente vocabulario	
c. Miedo a equivocarme		d. Confianza	
e. Temor a no hacerlo apropiadamente		f. Otro*	

- En caso de seleccionar "Otro", especifique cuál:

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## Appendix 4

**Entry: 4****Date:** April, 1st, 2017**Theme:** Past Simple Wrap up. Introduction to Quantifiers; Fast Food vs. Street Food. Students' Favorite Food.**Teacher:** Mauricio Ramírez

Based on the lesson's learning aim and the students' responses to the planned tasks, I can tell EFL learners were generally motivated to participate. First, language learners comprehended the past simple linguistic forms as well as the pronunciation rules of regular verbs; however, two of the learners who participated in the reading aloud tasks felt insecure and did not follow the pronunciation rules previously explored. On the other hand, since in the first survey learners mentioned they enjoyed hanging out with friends to either eat, have a drink, or chat, "Fast Food vs. Street Food" was the topic through which "quantifiers" were introduced. It boosted them to be more active class participants.

Furthermore, it was evidenced that some learners are focused on the lessons' development. In fact, before even talking about quantifiers, learners knew which the lesson's objective was and tuned in. Finally, given the fact that they had previously studied quantifiers in course 2, they were able to comprehend the implicit explanation. Nonetheless, some of the learners specifically asked for clarification, and it was provided along with examples. To conclude, although language learners actively participated and asked questions regarding the topic because they seemed to be interested and wanted to clarify doubts, I still feel they need more vocabulary in order to express themselves more fluently.

**Observer 1:** Jéssica Álvarez**Students to focus on:** **S1:** Alexander López **S2:** Karen Nicole Cortes **S3:** Andrea Raigoza.

Most of the learners were concentrated playing "Bingo" for Past reviewing verbs in past simple so they seemed to be engage with the activity. However, part of the group looked uncomfortable when teacher asked them to read aloud because they frown their foreheads especially when they should read the verbs in past tense. In today's class S3 interacted six times of which three times were for asking information about specific topics as S1 who participated eight times which three of them he asked for clarification. Based on my previous observations, S1 is one of the most kinesthetic learner in the group owing to he usually prefers miming instead of saying the word in Spanish when speaking and sharing his ideas.

On the other hand, S2 continues using "*How do you say?*" due to the lack of vocabulary in her oral production. Additionally, one of the most relevant aspects of today's lesson was the participation of a student who usually does not participate a lot; although, in the topic "Fast food vs Street food" he

participated four times whereas S2 participated three times in this section of the class. This allowed me to reflect on their participation, which can be linked to their interests given the fact that these two students had already mentioned in the first questionnaire their taste for food in their likes and interest.

**Observer 2:** Alejandro García

**Students to focus on:** **S1:** Marcela Nieto **S2:** Sebastián Quintero **S3:** Óscar Gómez

In today's lesson I perceived that learners felt more confident to speak due to the fact that they apparently showed interest to talk about food. In fact, learners were engaged when the T brainstormed their knowledge about simple past verbs by playing bingo in pairs. I noticed that Ls applied strategies such as: asking their peers, looking for the verbs online, and the verbs list they had. First, I want to mention that S1 participated three times today by reading the instructions when the T elicited them to help him, and also by sharing what she liked to eat regarding the food theme. Besides, she seemed to be interested today due to her different attitude when being part of the lesson. I realized she used English most of the time to ask the T, and she read the instructions of the worksheet not translating to L1, but trying to understand what mention there was.

Second, S2 participated four times today, one of them was by sharing his point of view between street and fast food, and he said: *"Teacher, the food quality, depending good or bad"* to explain the difference between them. Thus, when the T asked Ss for a volunteer, he raised his hand to read the instructions and the paragraph on the worksheet. I also observed that he is a leader in the groups, he has been part of due to his willingness to explain what is not clear at all for his partners in the group. Third, although S3 seemed to be interested to give ideas to the T, he did not show the willingness to share orally his point of view at the beginning of the class. In this case, I want to mention that S3 is willing to work in class, but when the T elicited them to share what they think or when he asked for volunteers he mumbled showing the desire not to share aloud what he was thinking. Today's lesson made me reflect that Ss felt more confident to speak when the theme is related to what they are interested in. Also, giving Ss the opportunity to share their ideas made them look confident when they used the target language, and more when the T allowed them to participate no matter if they made mistakes.

#### **Learners' general perception: Questionnaires**

Even though in the previous lesson 8,3% of the language learners (two) felt their participation was "justa", this lesson the percentage increased to 30,4% (seven), this because they considered they still need more vocabulary to freely express themselves. In addition, it is pertinent to mention that although in the previous lesson 16, 4% of the learners (four) considered their participation to be "muy buena", today 26, 1% of them ranked their participation as such.